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ABSTRACT

Underrepresentation of minority students in gifted and talented (G/T) programs is a well established fact. A study examined procedures and criteria used to identify, place, and instruct gifted and talented students with limited English proficiency (GT/LEPs) in Texas, California, Colorado, Florida, Arizona, and New York public schools, to help identify factors contributing to underrepresentation of this population in gifted and talented (GT) educational programs. GT program coordinators (n=268) in a cross-section of schools responded to a survey. Less than 20 percent had established a means for identifying GT/LEPs. Respondents identified characteristic GT student behaviors that might be masked by linguistic and cultural differences, including a variety of language, cognitive, inter-/intrapersonal, academic, and artistic skills. Almost 80 percent acknowledged the need to use different means of assessment than for mainstream students. Most used multiple sources in identifying GT/LEPs. Only about 30 percent found their identification processes successful. A majority had no community input in identification. Under 10 percent had programs to serve the students identified. Although most respondents agreed that technology was important in the education of these students, there were no recommendations for effective software. Very few established GT/LEP programs used differentiated instructional materials, as recommended in the literature, but a majority followed theoretically-based program models. Parent involvement was less extensive than parental support. (MSE)

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# Examining Identification and Instruction Practices for Gifted and Talented Limited English Proficient Students

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# EXAMINING IDENTIFICATION AND INSTRUCTION PRACTICES FOR GIFTED AND TALENTED LIMITED ENGLISH PROFICIENT STUDENTS

**Andrea B. Bermúdez**
**Steven J. Rakow**

**Abstract**

Underrepresentation of minority students in gifted and talented (G/T) programs is a well established fact. some of the reasons provided by researchers include: (a) the presence of systematic bias in the standardization process as instruments and approaches follow a middle-class mainstream basis of measurement; (b) the pervasive lack of cultural knowledge and sensitivity on the part of teachers and appraisers due to inadequate training; and (c) the common practice of identifying G/T students on the basis of a single test administration. These conventions exclude culturally and linguistically diverse students, for only the acculturated minority student participates in the screening process past the initial step. Furthermore, inadequate testing environments and methodologies often alienate the examinee, making the information obtained from testing questionable.

In addition, the general lack of consensus regarding an adequate operational definition already discussed, in conjunction with teachers' unawareness of how cultural and linguistic factors affect student behavior, makes determining the most appropriate means of identifying and instructing the linguistically and culturally diverse gifted and talented students difficult to conceptualize. This predicament leads to a lack of adequate criteria to properly identify and instruct these students. The purpose of this paper is to examine and describe the status of identification, placement, and instructional procedures for G/T LEP students used in public schools from Texas, California, Colorado, Florida, Arizona, and New York. These states were chosen because of their high concentration of Hispanic students.

Underrepresentation of minority students in gifted and talented (G/T) programs is a well established fact (Office of Civil Rights, 1984; LaFontaine, 1987). Some of the reasons provided by researchers include: (a) the presence of systematic bias in the standardization process (Markheady, et al, 1983) as instruments and approaches follow a middle-class mainstream basis of measurement (Bruch, 1975; Bruch & Curry, 1978; Cohen, 1988); (b) the pervasive lack of cultural knowledge and sensitivity on the part of teachers and appraisers due to inadequate training (Torrance, 1971; Fradd, et al, 1988; Bermúdez & Rakow, 1990); and (c) the common practice of identifying G/T students on the basis of a single test administration (Renzulli, 1970; Sullivan, 1973; NCAS, 1988). These conventions exclude culturally and linguistically diverse students, for only the acculturated minority student participates in the screening process past the initial step (Bernal, 1981). Additionally, inadequate testing environments and methodologies often alienate the examinee, making the information obtained from testing questionable (Bernal, 1981; Melesky, 1985).

The definition for giftedness provided by PL 97-35 of the Education Consolidation and Improvement Act (1981) offers a very generic framework:

> Children who give evidence of high performance capabilities in areas such as intellectual, creative, artistic, leadership, capacity, or specific academic fields, and who require services or activities not ordinarily provided in order to fully develop such capabilities.

Not all school systems interpret the above categories in the same fashion. Freedom in the interpretation of the definition does not ensure consideration and/or awareness of the unique characteristics and needs of culturally-different students (Bernal, 1974; Amodeo & Flores, 1981; Cohen, 1988). A commonly applied interpretation of the legal definition of a G/T student, for example, is one who "acts" or "behaves" gifted (Ebny & Smutny, 1990). However, these observations are based on mainstream middle class standards and value systems, as dialectal and cultural differences are not systematic components of the interpretation (Bruch, 1975; Cohen, 1988). One common approach to counteract this inherent bias, based on the belief that LEP students are less qualified than non-LEPs, is to lower the standards to give the G/T LEP student "a chance." This method results in the creation of a "second-order" gifted category (Bernal, 1981) which does considerable damage to the status of G/T LEP students placed in gifted programs.

Research has suggested several possibilities in establishing an adequate set of criteria to assess this type of student (Amodeo & Flores, 1981; Bernal, 1974; Cohen, 1988; Torrance, 1970; Witty, 1978). These recommendations include using non-standardized methods of assessment, for example: (a) self-reports, (b) observations of members from the same cultural group as the child's regarding giftedness, (c) teacher and parent observations of students solving problems in real-life situations, (d) parental interviews, (e) teacher and parent observation of student's ability to learn language and/or develop cultural skills, and (f) checklists developed with community and parental input. Researchers agree that using multiple source nominators (e.g., teachers, administrators, counselors, parents, peers, community members) provides more relevant data to properly identify the G/T LEP student (Frazier, 1989). A limitation associated with this identification strategy is the lack of parental and teacher training in the recognition of gifted traits in students (Gallegos & Flores, 1982; Nazzaro, 1981; Bermúdez & Rakow, 1990). In addition, the general lack of consensus regarding an adequate operational definition already discussed, in conjunction with teachers' unawareness of how cultural and linguistic factors affect student behavior, makes determining the most appropriate means of identifying and instructing the linguistically and culturally diverse gifted and talented students difficult to conceptualize (Bermudez & Rakow, 1990). This predicament leads to a lack of adequate criteria to properly identify and instruct these students. The purpose of this paper is to examine and describe the status of identification, placement, and instructional procedures for G/T LEP students used in public schools from Texas, California, Colorado, Florida, Arizona, and New York. These states were chosen because of their high concentration of Hispanic students.

## Methodology

Procedures and Data sources

A survey has been mailed to 500 G/T coordinators from public school districts in the states cited above. The 268 respondents have provided the information presented in this study. These school districts represented are a cross section of these states' public schools with regard to size, funding, and location.

| STATE | COUNT: | PERCENT: |
|---|---|---|
| Arizona | 35 | 13 |
| California | 19 | 7 |
| Colorado | 63 | 24 |
| Florida | 36 | 13 |
| Texas | 103 | 39 |
| New York | 11 | 4 |

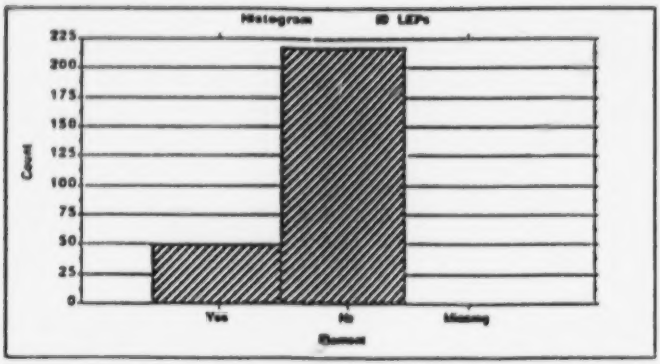
Results

A frequency distribution was calculated to examine and describe the status of identification and instruction of G/T LEP students. The generic items, questions 1 and 7, include all the respondents (N=268). Those items referring to assessment, questions 2-6, 8, and 11-12, include the respondents who indicated having developed identification processes for G/T LEPs (N=50). Questions 9 and 10, dealing with programmatic issues, contain only responses from those individuals who have developed specialized programs for G/T LEP students (N=23). The following responses to the questionnaire were obtained.

I. Identification Criteria

**1. Are you serving any identified gifted students who have limited English proficiency (LEP)?**

Only 18.7% of the respondents (50) indicated that they had developed a means to identify G/T LEPs. This finding is particularly disconcerting in light of the fact that the states targeted for this survey have a large proportion of Hispanic students who, as a result, are not receiving the required specialized services.




**2. What are some characteristics of G/T LEP students that would be masked due to language and cultural differences?**

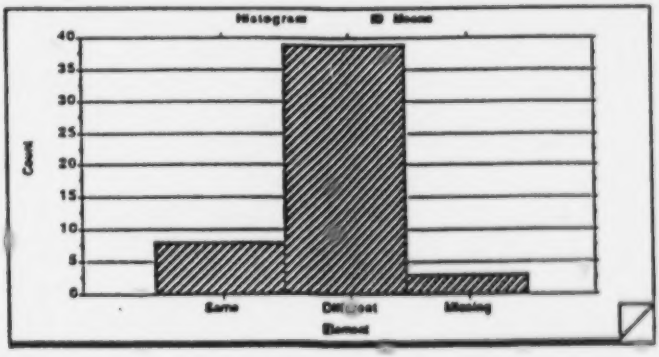
The following student behaviors were reported by those respondents who have developed identification means for GT/LEP students:

- **Language (Verbal and Non-Verbal)**
- **Cognition**
  - √ **Curiosity**
  - √ **Problem-Solving Style**
  - √ **Prior Knowledge**
  - √ **Logic and Thinking**
  - √ **Attending to Task**
  - √ **Spatial Relationships**
  - √ **Speed in Learning**
- **Inter/Intra-Personal Skills**
  - √ **Sense of Humor**
  - √ **Different Survival Skills**
  - √ **Self-Esteem**
  - √ **Leadership Skills**
  - √ **Participation in Class Activities**
  - √ **Interaction with Teacher and Peers**
  - √ **Question-Asking Behavior**
  - √ **Discipline**
- **Academic and Artistic Skills**
  - √ **Creativity**
  - √ **Musical Skills**

√ Performance in Academics
√ Ability to Perform in Timed Testing Situations

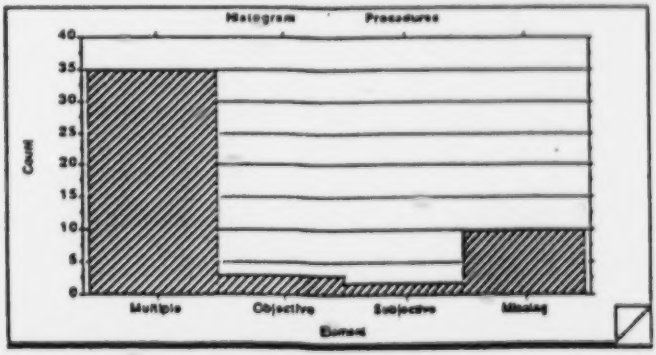
**3. Gifted Students whose proficiency in English is limited (G/T LEP) can be identified in the same ways as any gifted student.**

Seventy-eight percent acknowledged the need to use different means of assessment than those used for mainstream students (Witty, 1978).




**4. What criteria for identification of these students are you using?**

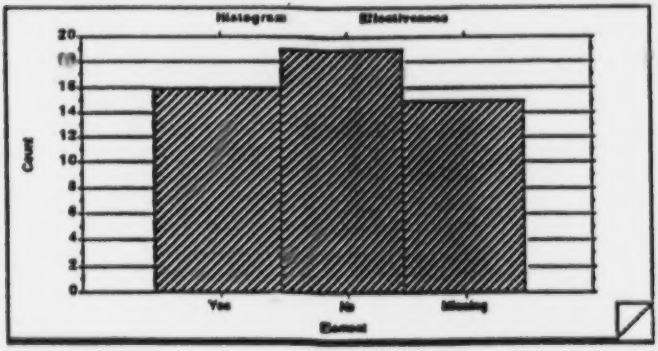
Seventy-percent of schools responding reported the use of multiple sources in identifying G/T LEP students as recommended by the research literature (Bernal, 1974; Leung, 1981; Torrance, 1978). Exhibit I presents the sources used by these individuals in the process of nomination and screening.




**5. Are these methods satisfactory?**

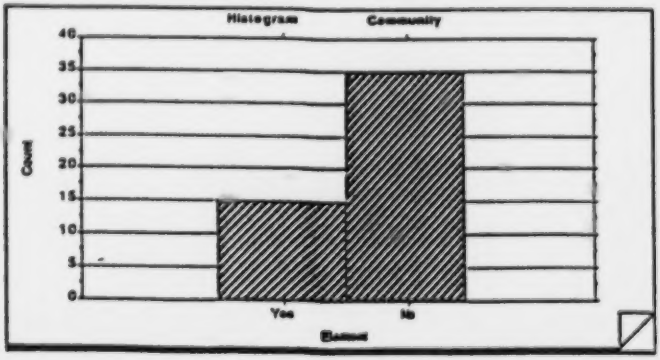
Thirty-two percent of the respondents found their identification process successful in dealing with the identification of GT/LEPs. Responses indicating lack of success or uncertainty ("Missing") about the effectiveness of these

methods raise serious questions about current identification practices for these students.




**6. Is the community involved in establishing criteria and characteristics of G/T LEPs?**

As noted earlier, community input in the process of identification is critical as the characteristics valued by the subculture should be taken into consideration (Leung, 1981). However, a majority (70%) of the respondents indicated that they had no community input in the process.

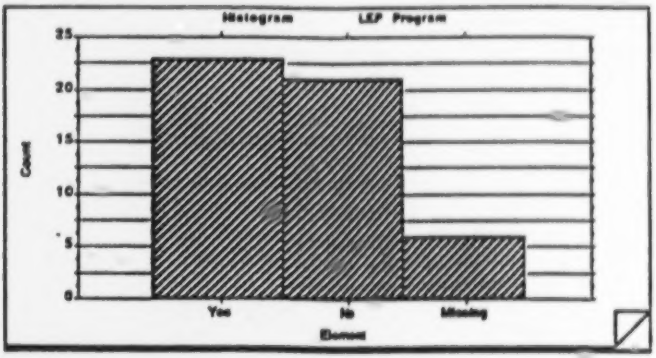



II. Instructional Program and Materials

**7. Our school district has a program used successfully with G/T LEPs.**

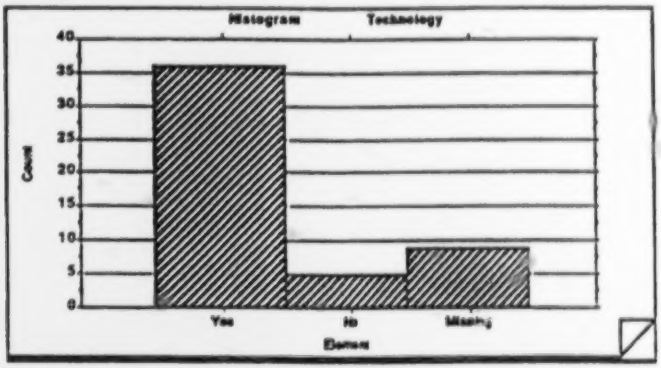
Lack of specialized programs for the G/T LEP was evident, as only 8.6% (23) of the total respondents (268) had any type of program to serve these students. Missing data could be indicative of lack of programs, thus adding to

the inadequacy of educational services for these students. Of the fifty programs which indicated having identification means in place, only 46% had a program for these students.




**8. Do you consider instructional technology an important medium to stimulate G/T LEPs?**

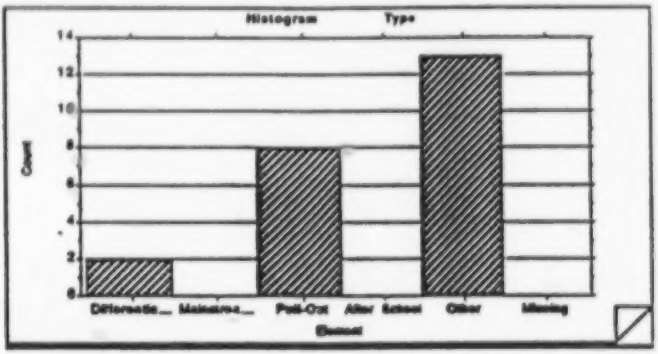
Although 72 % of the sample identifying GT/LEPs agreed that technology was important in the education of these students, there were no recommendations for effective software.




**9. Do you use differentiated instructional materials with G/T LEPs?**

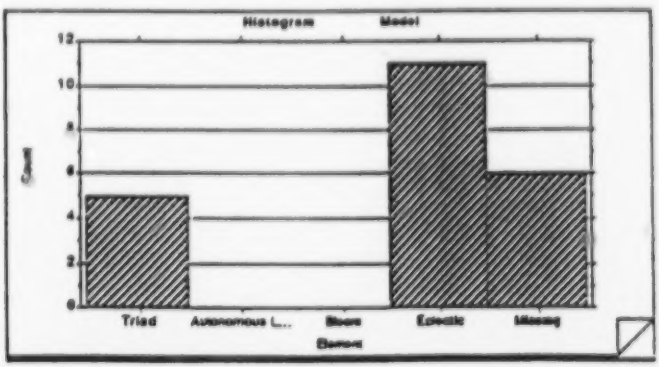
Research has identified effective materials which differentiate the content of instruction to accomodate the needs of G/T LEP students. These include: interdisciplinary mathematics, social studies and science (Valencia, 1985); visual and performing arts experiences (Niro & Wolf, 1982); focus on cultural values (Guinn, 1977); focus on careers (Stallings, 1976); focus on language development (Quisenberry, 1974); and multicultural emphasis on the curriculum

(Gallegos & Flores, 1982). Renzulli (1973) added the use of real-life problems and related action products in the classrooms serving these students. Only 8.7% of those respondents (2) indicating an established program for this type of student reported the use of differentiated materials. Thirty-four percent use pull-out formats and the majority (56.52%) do not adhere to any of the identified program typologies, including mainstreamed and after school settings.




**10. Is your program based on any particular model of gifted education?**

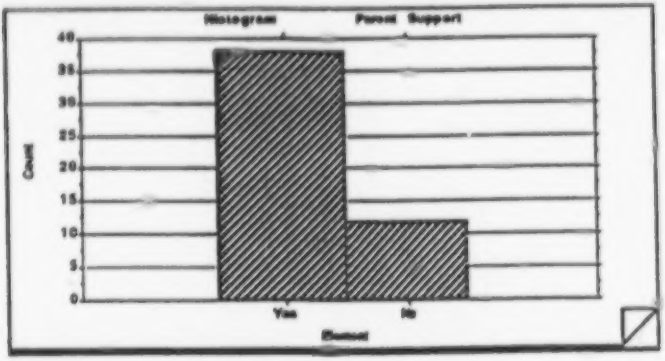
Seventy-eight percent of the established programs follow a theoretically founded model of gifted education. Of these 22.7% use Renzulli's TRIAD model and 50% a combination. There were 6 missing responses which could indicate schools' unawareness of theoretical and research foundations available for this area.




III. Parent Involvement

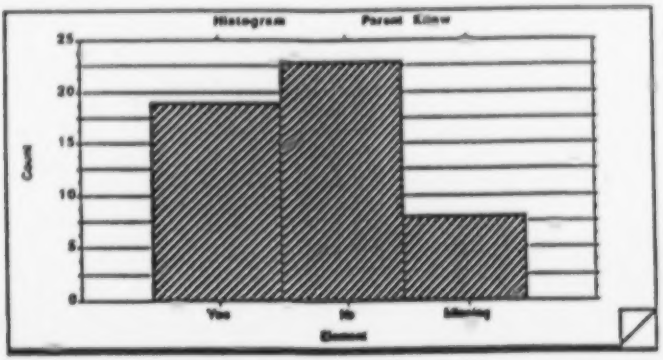
**11. Are the parents of G/T LEPs in your school knowledgeable about the needs of these children?**

Parental involvement has been identified by Gallegos and Flores (1982) as a critical component in identifying G/T LEPs. Parent nominations have been cited as an effective alternative to standardized measures. However, only 38% of those individuals who acknowledged having identification processes in place reported that their parents were cognizant about their children's needs. The missing data further underscores the lack of awareness reported.




**12. Are these parents supportive of school practices?**

Having parents interested and supportive of school practices is an important step in developing awareness of their important role in the identification and instruction of G/T LEP students. Seventy-six percent of the schools reported that parental support had been realized.




## Discussion

The survey data seems to indicate that there are very few programs identifying and/or instructing G/T LEP students in states with high Hispanic concentration. The majority of school district coordinators responding as having

developed identification procedures for G/T LEPs are using multiple sources to nominate and screen these students (refer to Exhibit I). However, only one-third of the respondents indicated any success with these measures. One reason might be that a great percentage of these individuals are excluding the community input in the identification process for these youngsters. This aspect needs to be examined as cultural and linguistic characteristics are best understood by members of the same cultural enclave. These characteristics present a challenge in the development of unbiased criteria (refer to question #2 of the survey).

The findings also indicate that the few programs focusing on G/T LEP students do not seem to systematically follow any particular instructional model for gifted education nor have a standard research-based classroom format to instruct these students. Training teachers and other support staff in these areas is a critical component for effective instruction.

As reported by the G/T coordinators, parents seem to be generally supportive of school practices but not very knowledgeable about their children's needs. It is important to consider parental training to develop a school-home partnership to address identification and instruction from a more comprehensive perspective. Although this picture clearly portrays a general lack of systematization and consensus, some encouraging programs surfaced. A site visitation to the Gifted and Talented Program in the La Joya Independent School District was conducted by the two researchers as a follow-up to the survey. In an effort to disseminate information regarding successful attempts to assess and instruct GT LEPs, a profile of this program is provided.

LA JOYA, ISD: A Texas Program That Works

The Gifted and Talented Program, Creative Productive Thinking Dimension (CPT), of the La Joya Independent School District Instructional Program has recently been developed to "serve the special needs of identified GT students and provide opportunities for all students to participate in enriched and exceptional learning activities" (La Joya ISD, Program Summary 1989-1990, p.10). This school district, located in the Rio Grande Valley, has a student population that is 98.6% Hispanic. Although this school district has a disproportionally low tax-base resulting from a predominantly migrant community, funding for the program is an integral part of the district's total budget.

1. Identification Procedures

The identification procedures used are adapted from Renzulli's Revolving Door Model. Multiple diagnostic measures are used beginning as early as pre-kindergarten. These include: (a) standardized tests*, (b) parent questionnaires, (c) teacher rating scales, and (d) student's portfolio. Directions are administered in English and Spanish or through the use of pantomime. Identification involves the following steps: (a) student profile is compiled by a teacher using

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* The Language Assessment Scales (LAS) is used from Pre-K through the 6th grade. In addition, the following instruments are used to assess the creative/productive thinking skills of the students: (a) Thinking Creatively Through Action and Movement (Grades PreK, K) and (b) Raven Coloured Progressive Matrices and Creativity Assessment Packet (Grades 1-6).

data from the various measures; (b) profiles are reviewed for each student selected by a committee composed of team teachers, campus supervisor, and campus CPT teacher; and (c) a parent profile is added to the data bank on each student. The committee continues to meet regularly to re-evaluate the pool of students who have been identified or who are potential candidates for the program. These processes are ongoing to allow for maximum participation in the CPT program.

2. Instruction/Curricular Materials

There are three levels to the CPT instructional model, following Renzulli's TRIAD: (a) essential learning level, (b) enriched learning level, and (c) exceptional learning level. Performance and motivation on the essential learning level, coupled with the information provided on the student data profile, allow students to advance to the next two levels. Curricular materials include Talents Unlimited, Open Court, and Tactics for Thinking.

The CPT program was developed in consultation of current research trends and it follows the philosophy and mission of La Joya Independent School District. A strong undercurrent of this philosophy is that all students are potentially gifted and should, therefore, be exposed to an enriched environment to ensure the realization of their giftedness. As a result, every student in the school is eligible for participation in the CPT program. Targeted exit behaviors include: (a) proficiency in two languages, (b) learner's increased self-esteem, (c) increased cognitive levels and critical thinking skills, (d) self-dependence, (e) concern for others, (f) technological expertise, and (g) improved physical and mental health.

In the CPT program, parents are actively involved in student identification, i.e. participating in the completion of parent questionnaires, and in classroom instruction as teacher aids. Over 500 parents volunteer in the school.

3. Training

Inservice workshops by field specialists on important issues related to identification and instruction of G/T LEP students take place on regular basis. Additional inservice by school G/T practitioners who meet with other school staff and parents is ongoing.

4. Evaluation

In order to evaluate the success of the program, the district has developed a three-pronged evaluation plan consisting of: (a) a campus management plan, (b) a district-wide management plan, and (c) an annual performance report. These various sources are reviewed periodically to assess the effectiveness of the program in student achievement.

5. Program Strengths

Overall strengths of the CPT program include: (a) interdisciplinary teaming (i.e., administrative, parental, teacher, and community support and commitment); (b) well trained personnel; (c) open lines of communication between the regular classroom teacher, the parents, and the G/T teacher; and (d) consistency of CPT program goals with the school district's philosophy and mission.

## Educational Implications of the Study

There are approximately 7.9 million school-aged youngsters whose home language is other than English (Waggoner, 1986). According to conservative estimates, 3% of a population is considered gifted (Cohen, 1988). Therefore, it should follow that 237,000 students have escaped identification as there is no official count available to support the contrary. While the number of school-age LEP students continues to grow, services to these students remain inadequate. Students who have been "identified" as LEP are generally subjected to inadequate assessment and placement practices which are responsible for continued overrepresentation in special education programs as well as underrepresentation in programs for the gifted and talented (LaFontaine, 1987).

Although a comprehensive school reform, including funding equalization, has recently taken place around the country, very little effort has been devoted to the identification of the various subpopulations included under the LEP umbrella. In some states, for example Texas, students identified as LEP cannot be considered for membership in other educational categories. Consequently, these students often receive non-academically oriented instruction. Labor market indicators predict an increase in scientific and computer-intensive jobs by the year 2000. Therefore, the need to intensify student participation in those fields, particularly the gifted and talented learner, has become more crucial. This is especially significant for LEP students who are disproportionally represented in science, mathematics, and technology careers (Rakow & Bermudez, 1988).

These facts, coupled with the escalating school dropout rates, particularly for Hispanic youth (U.S.Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, 1985), are clear indicators that schools have failed to adequately address the educational needs of these students. The gifted LEP youngsters have joined the ranks of the population at-risk of dropping out of school as, more often than not, they fall victims of unchallenging strategies and materials which do not entice them to stay in school. The devastating effects that undereducated subpopulations can have on the financial and cultural future of the nation have been clearly documented (Berlin, 1984; Caterall, 1985), notwithstanding the loss of productivity from gifted at-risk minority youngsters who fail to make maximum use of their talents. As a result, the need to develop a sensitivity to and knowledge about the needs and characteristics of these children is critical for school personnel, parents, and the community at large.

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EXHIBIT I: Identification Practices for GT LEP Students N=50

| Nomination | Screening |
|---|---|
| Self(2) | 1. Intellectual Abilities: |
| Peers | (a) Non-Verbal |
| Teachers(9) | Draw-A-Person |
| Parents | Cognitive Abilities Test |
| Raven* (5) | WISC-R (subtest) |
| Renzulli's Checklist | (b) Verbal |
| | Slosson |
| | Otis-Lennon |
| | WISC-R (subtest) |
| | Stanford Binet IV |
| | SOI Learning Abilities Test* |
| | SOI Gifted Screening Form* |
| | Matrix Analogies Test |
| | 2. Standardized Achievement |
| | ITBS (3) |
| | CTBS |
| | CAT |
| | 3. Creativity |
| | GIFT (2) |
| | Torrance* (4) |
| | William's Creativity Packet |
| | SAGES |

*Recommended by the National Report on Identification of Gifted and Talented. USDOE, 1982.



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